



News Release

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Contacts: Sherry Thomas, Health Systems Quality Assurance 360-236-4612
Allison Cook, Communications Office 360-236-4022

Hearing set on insurance coverage of chemotherapy treatment

OLYMPIA — State health officials are looking for ways to assure comparable access to different types of chemotherapy. A proposal, now under review, would require insurance companies to provide comparable benefits for oral and injected or intravenous anti-cancer medication. Public comment will be taken at a hearing Monday, June 28 at 1 p.m. in Tumwater.

The state Department of Health is reviewing the proposal at the direction of the legislature. It would require health plans to make sure coverage for oral treatments are “no less favorable” than other methods of chemotherapy. The goal is to learn how big the coverage problem is and determine if the proposal is in the best interest of the public. The agency must make recommendations to the legislature by December 1, 2010.

Chemotherapy is used broadly and may be expensive. Across the nation, about half of men and a third of women risk either developing or dying from cancer, according to the American Cancer Society. One in five cancer patients uses all or most of their savings paying for cancer treatment. About 11,000 people died of cancer in Washington last year. An estimated 32,000 new cancer cases were diagnosed statewide in 2009. According to a report submitted with the proposal, about 25 percent of medical claims for cancer per year involve chemotherapy.

The legislature asked for the study after hearing concerns that insurance carriers sometimes cover intravenous treatment as a medical benefit, and oral treatment as a prescription benefit. Plans may require the insured person to contribute a percentage of the cost of the medication, adding to the patient cost for treatments.

[Additional details about this review](http://www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/sunrise/CurrentReviews/OralChemoMeds/Default.htm) are on the state Department of Health’s website (www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/sunrise/CurrentReviews/OralChemoMeds/Default.htm).

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